

# Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



*A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library*

St. Olaf College

Northfield, Minnesota

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**NUMBER 43**  
February, 2002

# Danish Instruction

**Danish Instruction  
to be offered at  
the Library  
July 2002.**

*Sinead Ladegaard Knox, Kierkegaard scholar and Danish native speaker, will be teaching Danish for Kierkegaard scholars for 4 weeks at the Kierkegaard Library in July of 2002. Sessions will meet 3-4 hours each morning. Cost for participation will be \$500 for tuition and housing at St. Olaf College. Those interested in participating in this language program should contact Gordon Marino by March 15, 2002 at [marino@stolaf.edu](mailto:marino@stolaf.edu)*

**July of 2002**

# NEWS FROM THE HONG KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY

Submitted by Cynthia Wales Lund, Assistant Curator. Email: [lundc@stolaf.edu](mailto:lundc@stolaf.edu). Tel. 507-646-3846, Fax 507-646-3858.

## THE KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, 2002

Summer fellowships for research in residence are offered to scholars for use of the collection between June 1 and November 15. The awards include campus housing and a \$250.00 per month stipend. Scholarships are also available at other times of the year.

To apply for a fellowship, send a letter outlining your proposed research project and reasons for wanting to use the collection, along with a curriculum vitae or other description of qualifications. Two academic letters of recommendation are also requested. The application deadline is March 15, 2002. To apply, send materials and letter to:

Gordon Marino, Curator  
Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library  
St. Olaf College  
1510 St. Olaf Avenue  
Northfield, MN 55057-1097

Fax: 507-646-3858  
email: [marino@stolaf.edu](mailto:marino@stolaf.edu)

## SPECIAL EVENTS

On November 16, 2001, a gathering of approximately 75 people took place in the lobby area outside the Library for the unveiling of two bronze sculpture busts of Howard and Edna Hong. President Thomforde accepted this gift to the college on behalf of St. Olaf College. Douglas Koons spoke about the creation of the busts on behalf of the donors which include private individuals and the Friends of the Kierkegaard Library. The sculptor, Joe Wangerin, also spoke concerning his work with the Hongs on this project and about his creative process. Howard and Edna Hong offered reflective remarks.

The presentation of the busts was preceded by a business meeting held by the Friends. Later a luncheon was offered followed by a discussion of Kierkegaard's text, "At a Graveside." The Friends were joined by members of the Cannon Valley Pastors' Association for both lunch and discussion. Discussion was led by President Thomforde, Gordon Marino, Howard Hong, Jamie Lorentzen and others.

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

Approximately 250 new titles were acquired since August 2001.

We would like to thank the following scholars and friends for their contributions to the Library: Elisabeth Behar, Pat Cutting, Mikael Kristensen, Todd Nichol, Hans Aaen, Lou Pojman, Zdeněk Zecpal, Rev. Donald Fox, Ron Damholt, Alice and Charles Mcnamara, Myron Penner, Erik Lindland, Sophia Scopetea, Kinya Masugata, the Narum family, Gool Library at Carleton College, Gordon Marino, and Howard Hong.

The Hong Kierkegaard Library strongly encourages the donation of books and articles on Kierkegaard and related thinkers to add to its collections and to share with other libraries and scholars. Gift books are so indicated with a special donor bookplate.

## PROGRESS IN THE ARCHIVES, THE CATALOG, AND COLLECTION PRESERVATION

All volumes from the Hongs' original donation of the Library to St. Olaf College have finally been cataloged in entirety, thanks to the assistance of Gretchen Hardgrove during the past year. Most of the collection was formally cataloged in the late 1980's and early 1990's with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities which made access possible to our holdings beyond St. Olaf and now throughout the world via the Internet. A small backlog remained from this project but is now completed. (Small more current backlogs of various kinds remain to be done in addition to our annual addition of approximately 500 titles per year.)

## PUBLICATIONS

The Library sponsors the undergraduate journal of existentialist thought, *The Reed*. This journal, which is now entering its fourth year of publication, includes scholarly essays, short stories, and poetry. Those interested in either submitting to this journal or in receiving a copy should contact Gordon Marino at marino@stolaf.edu.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### James E. Loder 1931-2001

Word was received from Matt Frawley concerning the death of James Loder, Mary D. Synnott Professor of the Philosophy of Christian Education, Princeton Theological Seminary, in November of 2001. We are grateful for Professor Loder's presence with us at our June conference. Of particular interest to our scholars have been his books, *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science* (written with W. Jim Neidhardt) and *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*.

## News From The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen

Volume 23 of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* containing the notebooks of 1833-1846 came out on November 23, 2001. The *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook 2001* was received by subscribers in August 2001.

### Call for Papers: Kierkegaardiana Volume 23

Contributions should be sent to Pia Søltoft at *Kierkegaardiana*, Kannikestraede 15, 1169 København K, Denmark. The deadline for submissions is June 31, 2002.

## News From *International Kierkegaard Commentary* Editor

### International Kierkegaard Commentary

What volume is next? When are the papers due?  
Call for papers for International Kierkegaard Commentary  
"Practice in Christianity"  
Papers due 1 September 2002

What is the most recently published volume of IKC?  
International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'The Concept of Irony' was published in November.

What volume is in the press now?  
International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'For Self-Examination' [and] 'Judge for Yourself!'

The papers for what volume are under review and revision now?  
International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses'

One paper for International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity is in hand, at least one is in draft, and 12 more are proposed at the moment this is written. Direct all communication to:

Robert L. Perkins  
Editor, International Kierkegaard Commentary  
225 South Boundary Avenue  
DeLand, FL 32720-5103

rperkins6@cfl.rr.com 386-734-6457

## Kierkegaard Cabinet in Budapest

In March 2001, the Kierkegaard Cabinet opened at Budapest University Eötvös Lorand, hosted by the Institute of Aesthetics. This resource center functions as an independent foundation, with the mandate to support Kierkegaard scholarship in Hungary and the Central Eastern European region and to assist in the translation of Kierkegaard's works into Hungarian. The "heart" of the Cabinet is a special library and an electronic database which provides contacts with other resource and research centers in the world. The Cabinet welcomes scholars, students, and researchers from Central and Eastern Europe.

The founder of the Kierkegaard Cabinet Foundation is Péter Nádas. Members of the Board include Chairperson, András Nagy; Béla Bacsó, head of the Institute of Aesthetics; and Thomas Berntsen, director of the Danish Cultural Institute in Hungary. Sponsors of the Cabinet include The Royal Danish Embassy, The Danish Cultural Institute, The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre (Copenhagen) and the Hong Kierkegaard Library.

Address: Kierkegaard Cabinet  
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Website: <http://kierkegaard.elte.hu/>

Hours: Wednesday and Thursday during the academic year, 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM.  
(Appointments possible for other times with advance notice.)

To request information about the Kierkegaard Cabinet or to offer books, articles, databases, etc. for scholars, students, and translators in the region, please contact András Nagy at [andrasnagy@mail.mataav.hu](mailto:andrasnagy@mail.mataav.hu).

### NEW WEBSITE!

Look for the improved and more useful Kierkegaard Library website available in February 2002 at <http://www.stolaf.edu/library/kierkegaard/>

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## ARTICLES

### THE MASTER THIEF, ALIAS S. KIERKEGAARD, AND HIS ROBBERY OF THE TRUTH

By Sara Katrine Jandrup  
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"I am amazed that (as far as I know) no one has ever treated *the idea of a 'master-thief,'* an idea that certainly would lend itself very well to dramatic treatment." (*Pap. I A 11*, September 12, 1834; *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, eds. Howard v. and Edna H. Hong, no. 5061)

As Søren Kierkegaard wonders here, I too wonder why nobody—to my knowledge—has investigated the role played by the Master Thief in Kierkegaard's writings. In the following article, I will therefore focus on this theme.

From the autumn of 1834 and the following half year, Kierkegaard outlined his ideas of a figure he calls "the master thief,"<sup>1</sup> an idea that he occasionally takes up in his subsequent writings, particularly in the pseudonymous ones. According to Kierkegaard, the Master Thief is a humorist, yet also a melancholic character. He is dissatisfied with the established order, and therefore aims, by teasing the authorities, to disclose the true nature of what they claim to be justice. In a way, then, the Master Thief can, according to Kierkegaard, can be considered a martyr, because he willingly accepts his punishment—"as a man who is conscious of having lived for an idea" (*Pap. I A 12; Journals and Papers*, no. 5062).

This predication is precisely what Kierkegaard later expresses his own hopes for in the *Point of View*.<sup>2</sup> Such a figure might not be a martyr in the mold of Christ, but would certainly be a martyr in the mold of Socrates—at least in the mold of the Socrates we encounter in Kierkegaard's writings!

It is thus the very same Master Thief who, twelve years after his earliest outlines in the *Journals and Papers*, gets (or snatches back) the last word in what, at that point, was intended to be the final work in Kierkegaard's authorship: the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

#### What and how

The final chapter of this work, chapter 5, is a strange

"conclusion," which only *indirectly* sums up what precedes it. This chapter is divided into three sections, the last of which is entitled "Being a Christian is defined subjectively in this way." Climacus opens this section by stating that "Being a Christian is defined not by the 'what' of Christianity but by the 'how' of the Christian" (*Postscript*, transl. Hong, p. 610). The problem with being defined by a "what" is that it is something which is objective and exterior and thus completely incommensurate with the Christian inwardness that Kierkegaard insists upon. A little later, a connection is drawn between the one who seeks to be a Christian and the ironical observer/writer. Climacus describes ironical observation as follows: "All ironical observing is a matter of continually paying attention to 'how,' whereas the honorable gentleman with whom the ironist has the honor of dealing pays attention only to the 'what'" (Hong, p. 614). The gentleman whom the ironist has "the honor of dealing with" is none other than the reader.<sup>3</sup> The reader is indirectly warned that he had better pay attention to the "how" of the ironist—and to himself, if he wants to part with the role of the honorable gentleman!

According to Climacus, the Christian "how" does not and cannot express itself directly. In order to recognize it, one must therefore possess the powers of ironical (self-) observation. Reading the *Postscript* thus requires this very kind of (self-) observation, if the reader is to come to terms with the intricate relationship between earnest and jest in the text. What is required from the reader is, in this sense, *judgment*.

In developing his statements about "what" and "how," Climacus tells a sort of parable. This parable has, in a way, the *Postscript's* last word. I therefore, quote it in full:

It is supposed to have happened in England that a man was assaulted on the highway by a robber disguised with a large wig. He rushes at the traveller, grabs him by the throat, and shouts: Your wallet. He takes the wallet, which he keeps, but he throws away the wig. A poor

man comes down the same road, finds the wig, puts it on, and arrives in the next town, where the traveller has already given the alarm. He is recognized, arrested, and identified by the traveller, who swears that he is the man. By chance, the robber is present in the courtroom, sees the mistake, turns to the judge and says, "It seems to me that the traveller is looking more at the wig than at the man" and asks permission to make an experiment. He puts on the wig, grabs the traveller by the throat, and says: Your wallet – and the traveller recognizes the robber and offers to swear to it – but the trouble is that he already has sworn an oath. So it goes with everyone who in one way or another has a "what" and pays no attention to "how"; he swears, he takes an oath, he runs errands, he risks his life and blood, he is executed – all for the wig.

If my memory does not fail me, I have already told this story once before in this book; yet I wish to end the whole book with it. I do not think that anyone will in truth be able to accuse me ironically of having varied it in such a way that it has not remained the same. (Hong, pp. 615f.)

The fact that Climacus permits this parable to conclude the whole book indicates that it indirectly sums up the "plot" of the work. The hero is a thief, a robber; the parable can therefore be called a "robber's tale" [*røverhistorie*], which in Danish means a story that is not to be believed at face value. It is typical of Climacus that he very consciously plays on Danish turns of phrase. The moral of the story can be expressed with just such a turn of phrase: "one shouldn't judge the dog by its hair" [*man skal ikke skue hunden på hårene*], a warning that appearances are deceiving. Here, the reader is warned that he shouldn't judge the robber (the writer) by his wig, i.e., that he should not consider his "what" as something independent of his "how".

In the *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard writes the following about the Master Thief:

We could also imagine him as one who would make fools of a court, but we must regard this as a kind of jest about the whole thing and an expression in deed of a vanity entirely consistent with his idea. He will never abandon candour, and he will come with his own

confession as soon as he has demonstrated how he *could* hoodwink a court. (*Pap. I A 12*, 17 September 1834; *Journals and Papers*, no. 5062).

In this way, the Master Thief, just like Climacus, mixes jest and earnest. His truest robbery occurs in the courtroom, where his intervention prompts the victim of the robbery to become aware of the unreasonableness of his own *judgment* — a loss far greater than the loss of his wallet; a loss, furthermore, that the reader of Climacus has been warned against!

### Irony's deceitful tongue

In *The Postscript* the parable of the robber is a twice-told tale; it has already been told in the chapter "An Expression of Gratitude to Lessing". It is worth noting what is implied by the concluding remark of chapter 5, where Climacus comments upon retelling the tale, "I do not think that anyone will in truth be able to accuse me ironically of having varied it in such a way that it has not remained the same" (Hong, p. 616), namely, that the reader might also accuse Climacus of having changed, of being someone he is not. He assumes the place of the plaintiff in order to make the reader take the place of the robbed one. It is assumed that the reader is keen to judge; the reader is, as was mentioned, indirectly warned not to repeat the—quite as serious—crime of committing perjury through hasty judgment. That this, in fact, is what Climacus expects of the reader is evident from the first time the tale of the robber is told.

This complements Climacus' praise of Lessing because the latter did not say anything against or in favor of Christianity in such a way that anyone would have anything to bear witness to:

It was a misuse of his dialectical skill that he must necessarily occasion them to swear falsely (since they necessarily had to swear), both when they swore that what he said now was the same as what he had said before because the form and clothing were the same, and also when they swore that what he said now was not the same because the form and the clothing had changed" (Hong, pp. 68f).

Those who are too eager to swear are scorned, and are at the same time warned not to believe that there is a straightforward relation between signifier and signified—the lesson *per se* of the ironist. We should not follow in the footsteps of the man who "should have

prudently confined himself to swearing that he recognized the wig" (Hong, p. 69). We cannot catch the ironist by his statements, and do wisely in not swearing upon them.

Climacus' conclusion in chapter 5 can thus be understood as an anticipation of the judgment that one could expect from a reader, a judgment on whether the book speaks for or against Christianity and a judgment, furthermore, on whether it is the author himself which is speaking to us. So how should we judge the Master Thief, alias the ironist, alias Climacus? Well, in his *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard writes the following:

"(...) while the authorities are in pursuit to capture him, and the populace, on the other hand, regards him suspiciously as one who is, after all, a thief, although perhaps an inner voice sometimes speaks in his defense, and at the same time he finds no encouragement and comfort among the other thieves since they are far inferior to him and are dominated by viciousness. The only possible association he can have with them is solely for the purpose of using them to achieve his aims; otherwise he must despise them." (*Pap. I A 11*, September 12, 1834; *Journals and Papers*, no. 5061).

This Master Thief is again clearly reminiscent of Socrates, as well as of Climacus/Kierkegaard.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Socrates, the other thieves could obviously represent the sophists. In the case of Climacus/Kierkegaard, the authorities could be the Danish state church, and "the other thieves" could be equivalent to various "freethinkers"—while Climacus/Kierkegaard could of course occupy the role of a "believing freethinker."

The latter parallel becomes even more evident from what Climacus next writes in his chapter on Lessing. His tribute to the German writer increasingly seems an indirect self-portrait:

"And now his [Lessing's, my comment] style! (...) This stylistic nonchalance that works out a simile down to the minutest detail, as if the presentation itself had a value (...) This mixture of jest and earnestness that makes it impossible for a third person to know definitely which is which — unless the third person knows it by himself." (Hong, p. 69).

This ironical "mixture of jest and earnestness," which Climacus excels in, is what another pseudonym,

Constantin Constantius of *Repetition*, hails, in another play on a Danish idiom, as the **thieves-language** [*røversprog*] of the ironist.<sup>5</sup> This kind of language does not force any conclusion upon the reader, but helps him instead to reflect upon himself. The reader *must*, at his own peril, take responsibility for the way in which he understands the relationship between jest and earnestness in the text. The question of truth, then, turns out to be a subjective question. In this way, Climacus compares Lessing's technique to that of his ideal ironist: Socrates.

Climacus opposes Lessing and Socrates to Hegel, who he scornfully points out should have died "with the words that no one understood him except one person, who misunderstood him" (Hong, p. 70, footnote). This statement presupposes that direct communication is possible and desirable, if not always successful, an assumption Climacus views as a naïve idea, which Socrates, "who artistically arranged his entire method of communication so as to be misunderstood", did not share.

It is interesting that the Master Thief, as he is portrayed in the *Journals and Papers*, is also a misunderstood character: "Frequently the master-thief also feels extremely unhappy about his position, about his being regarded by many as branded; he feels *misunderstood* (tragically)" (*Pap. I A 15*, Feb. 9, 1835; *Journals and Papers*, no. 5074). Here being misunderstood is a tragic fate; but the Master Thief quickly becomes a *humorist*, and later on being misunderstood in fact proves essential to the Kierkegaardian Master Thieves. Lessing, Socrates and Climacus all refuse to be (directly) understood!

### The big question

In the first passage of chapter 5 of the *Postscript*, titled the "Conclusion," Climacus indirectly depicts his own activity as a robber's assault:

If there is anyone in our day whom Christianity disturbs, which I do not doubt and which can be demonstrated factually, one thing can be demanded of him — that he keep silent, because, viewed ethically, his discourse is a robber assault and its consequences is even worse, since it ends up with both having nothing, the robber and the victim. (Hong, p. 590, translation slightly modified).

If one reads this statement closely, it becomes evident



that “nothing” can be understood as a positive designation, since Climacus writes “both” instead of “either,” indicating that there was no real loss.

What sort of “nothing” is it, then, that they both end up with, if the robber is an ironist of the aforementioned kind? This “nothing” is, perhaps, identical to the *nothing* which (according to Kierkegaard) a religious person must strive to become so that “God can illuminate him” (*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, tr. Hong, p. 399). Such a *nothing* can, if it is truly maintained in existence—as, according to Climacus, is the case with Socrates—become an analogy to faith and may even constitute a stepping stone for the leap that Faith requires. The robbery, in short, serves a higher purpose.

As Kierkegaard puts it in his *Christian Discourses*, in parallel to Climacus’s parable of the robber:

But his discourse of immortality—yes, it aims to violate public or, more correctly here, private security. ... It is as an assault, bold as an assault in broad daylight, as terrifying as an assault at night. ... It divides people into the righteous and the unrighteous, and in so doing asks you whether you count yourself among the righteous or among the unrighteous. It places this question in the closest connection with immortality – indeed, it does not speak about immortality but about this distinction. Is that not like an assault! (Hong, p. 202-203)

The truth of Christianity is a *personal question*. The question concerns nothing less than the divine salvation of the individual. Moreover, this question robs the individual of his own (illusory) security. In *The Postscript*, the meaning of the text becomes inseparable from the question of the reader’s belief. In this courtroom, where we presume that we are the ones to judge, it turns out that we are the ones charged. The jest is earnest indeed: ‘Judge and thee shall be judged’.<sup>5</sup>

### The holy universal ironic teacher

After chapter 5 of *The Postscript* follows an “Appendix,” where Climacus seals his message in a truly performative fashion:

Just as in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds a note at the back of the book that notifies the reader that everything is to be understood in accordance with the teaching of the holy universal mother

Church, so also what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only an end but has a revocation to boot. One can ask for no more than that, either before or afterward. (Hong, p. 619)

Master Thief is thus not without dogmas of his own. The revocation of whatever is stated is his own “holy universal” dogma, comparable, according to Climacus, even to the teachings of the Catholic mother church—an added twist to the thief’s ironical game with the reader! This twist corresponds to the remark, cited above, that the Master Thief “will come with his own confession as soon as he has demonstrated how he *could* hoodwink a court” (*Pap.* 1A 12, 1834). Such a confession effectively robs the putatively objective “truth of the matter” of whatever authority it might possess. When *Climacus* himself makes such a confession, he leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty: the reader must, at his own peril, judge for himself. In the end, therefore, the Master Thief always gets (or snatches back) the last word.

<sup>1</sup> Gregor Malantchuk suggests that “Kierkegaard’s speculations on ‘the master-thief’ were motivated by a desire to find moral support for his spying observation of his father” (*Kierkegaard’s Thought*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 27. This explanation does not take into account this motif’s importance for Kierkegaard’s authorship as a whole. However, it is arguably correct that the Master Thief does have the qualifications of a spy: there are obvious parallels between the Master Thief and another character in Kierkegaard’s writings, the “agile spy”: both are beyond the law, in the sense that each stands outside the ethical life of his community, and aims to disclose that community’s false pretensions.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Point of View*, Part 2, at the beginning of the “Conclusion”: “I have nothing more to say, but in conclusion I will allow someone else to speak, my poet, who, when he comes, will usher me to the place among those who suffered for an idea” (Hong, p. 95)

<sup>3</sup> In describing his relationship to his reader, Climacus in fact uses the expression “(ind)lader sig med,” to “admit oneself to the company of” the reader. See the *Postscript*, tr. Hong, p. 325: The “communication must be marked like this, not directly, of course, for it cannot be communicated directly between man and man ... (thi det lader sig mellem Mand og Mand ikke meddele ligefrem).”

<sup>4</sup> However, in his well-known afterword, Kierkegaard underscores that the pseudonyms’ writings are not to be mistaken for Kierkegaard’s own. Thus, although Climacus’s ideals and reflection are so near to Kierkegaard’s own, they cannot be thought of as pertaining to the same person. Only

the "wigs" are the same!

<sup>5</sup> Hong's translation ignores this. See *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, tr. Hong, p. 145. The ironist "can express everything in his jargon [*Tyvesprog*, lit. thieves' tongue], and no sigh is so deep that he does not have the laughter that corresponds to it in his jargon [*Tyvesprog*], and no request is so obtrusive that he doesn't have the witticism to fulfill the demand."

<sup>6</sup> Anti-Climacus makes the following comment about Climacus (though without mentioning his name) in *Practice in Christianity*: "One presents faith in the eminent sense, and represents it in such a way that the most orthodox sees it as a defense of the faith and the atheist sees it as an attack, while the communicator is a zero, a nonperson, an objective something" (Hong, 133). So while the text doesn't present us with an objective truth (an attack or a defense), it becomes clear by our judgment "who is the believer, who is the free thinker" (SV16, s. 130).

## KIERKEGAARD ON MIRACLES: INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

By Jyrki Kivelä  
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In the following, I discuss briefly Kierkegaard's view on miracles. I observe how Kierkegaard is only tangentially interested in the philosophical problem of miracles. According to Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, the miraculous element is never immediately observable in an alleged miracle. Historical contemporaneity makes no difference: a miracle is no more immediate to an eyewitness than it is to someone who reads about the alleged miracle two thousand years later in the Bible.

As Kierkegaard shows very little explicit interest in natural laws or in order of nature in general, it is not surprising that he also shows very little interest in miracles explicitly defined as violations of natural laws. Further, Kierkegaard does not argue for any particular definition of a miracle. He and his pseudonyms are interested in *belief in miracles* and in the relevance this belief has or should have to a person's religious resolutions.

Reading the literature, one observes that miracles are almost exclusively mentioned in connection with Kierkegaard's pseudonyms Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus,<sup>1</sup> and their *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice of*

*Christianity* are part of my focus of interest in this paper. On the other hand, Kierkegaard makes philosophically relevant remarks about miracles in his signed writings and in his unpublished writings, too. For example, there is a whole topical section on miracles in *Journals and Papers*. In the following, what I have in mind is the idea of a miracle overriding the order of nature, which has received its most famous expression in the definition of a miracle by David Hume: "A miracle may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent."<sup>2</sup>

In *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* Kierkegaard writes about John the Baptizer, whose origin Kierkegaard describes "as marvelous [vidunderlig] as the origin of the one whose coming he proclaimed, but the difference here again was the same as the difference between the marvel [Vidunderlige] that an aged woman becomes pregnant, which is contrary to the order of nature [mod Naturens Orden], and that a pure virgin bears a child by the power of God, which is above the order of nature [over Naturens Orden]."<sup>3</sup> In *Journals and Papers*

Kierkegaard also refers to this same biblical event, and calls it one of “the highest collisions, where the expected is altogether opposed to the order of nature [mod Naturens Orden] (for example, that Sara conceives a child although far beyond the natural age to bear children).”<sup>4</sup> According to Kierkegaard, some event being contrary to the order of nature does not mean that it is an overriding of the order of nature (or, perhaps, a transgression of a law of nature), because there is no law or order of nature ‘saying’ that an aged woman could not become pregnant, within certain biological preconditions, of course. In my view, Kierkegaard means that an event is ‘contrary (or opposed) to the order of nature,’ when it is something very rare and surprising but belongs still to the natural realm of things, and ‘above the order of nature,’ when it clearly violates some uniformly established regularity of nature. As I see it, Kierkegaard’s ‘above the order of nature’ refers to the ‘truly miraculous’ as something very exceptional, which violates or transgresses the order of nature—that is, like ‘a pure virgin’ bearing a child by ‘the power of God.’ The ‘contrary to the order of nature’ refers to the ‘merely marvelous’ in the sense of something very rare and surprising, but not overriding what is possible in the natural realm of things—a woman can sometimes bear children although she is ‘far beyond the natural age’ to do it. It is important to note that the paragraph from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* cited above is the only one in Kierkegaard’s published writings, as well as, to my knowledge, in his unpublished writings, where he explicitly discusses miracles in relation to natural order. Kierkegaard uses the phrase ‘contrary (or opposed) to the order of nature’ [‘mod Naturens Orden’] once (above) in his published writings and, to my knowledge, once (above) in his unpublished writings; he uses ‘above the order of nature’ [‘over Naturens Orden’] only in the paragraph from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* cited above and ‘the order of nature’ (or ‘the natural order’) only twice in addition to the paragraphs cited above, in the simple sense of, in my own words, ‘this is just how things are in this world we live in.’<sup>5</sup>

In *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* Kierkegaard also writes: “youth understands it immediately—how marvelous—but is not the fact it is marvelous again the explanation! There was a thinker, much admired in memory, who taught that miracle was a characteristic of the Jewish people, that in a characteristic way this people leaped over the intervening causes to reach God.”<sup>6</sup> The thinker Kierkegaard is referring to is Spinoza.<sup>7</sup> In *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard discusses the same issue: “Strange that Spinoza continually objects to miracles and revelation on the ground that it was a Jewish trait to lead something directly back to God and leap over the intermediate causes, just as if this were a peculiarity

only of the Jews and not of all religiousness, so that Spinoza himself would have done so if he had been basically religious, and as if the difficulty did not lie right here: whether, to what extent, how—in short, inquiries which could give the keenest thinking enough to do.”<sup>8</sup> Kierkegaard thus suggests that there is a connection between seeing something as a miracle and ‘leaping over the intervening causes to reach God.’<sup>9</sup> Further, this trait is something that is characteristic, according to Kierkegaard, of all religiousness. In my view, Kierkegaard suggests that religious people have a kind of inclination to see natural events as miracles or God’s acts, and that they do not bother with available natural or scientific explanations expressed in terms of natural laws—that is, they leap over the intervening causes to reach God and, in a way, see God everywhere. Hence, a ‘miracle’ under discussion in the paragraph above from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* is not (based on the quoted *Journals and Papers* entry, too) necessarily overriding of the order of nature and, consequently, is not necessarily a “truly miraculous’ event. As I see it, it is more like an expression of its user’s religious attitude and faith in a certain interpretation of a certain event than in a description of the event itself. In *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* Kierkegaard writes how Ascension “disrupts or contravenes natural laws” and how it “goes against all the laws of nature,”<sup>10</sup> but he *does not* call Ascension a miracle and, in fact, *does not explicitly discuss natural laws in relation to miracles at all!* Kierkegaard mentions a law or laws of nature only in five paragraphs in his published writings in addition to those above but, as I see it, they are not relevant regarding the theme of my paper.<sup>11</sup>

In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes how “faith always relates itself to what is not seen” and how a person “by faith *believes* the *unseen into* [‘til’ is in bold-face in the original] what is seen” and a little later, regarding love’s forgiveness, “the miracle of faith happens (and every miracle [Mirakel] is then a miracle of faith—no wonder, therefore, that along with faith miracles [Miraklerne] also have been abolished!).”<sup>12</sup> In *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* Kierkegaard writes how “[I]deed, no gaze is as sharp-sighted as that of faith, and yet faith, humanly speaking, is blind; reason, understanding, is, humanly speaking, sighted, but faith is against the understanding.”<sup>13</sup> I suggest that Kierkegaard means that faith is blind in the sense that it goes beyond the immediate and in this sense does not see it. Understanding, on the other hand, sees only the immediate and in this sense is sighted. In *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* Kierkegaard refers to miraculous healings by Christ: “In order to be healed, the person must believe—now he believes and is healed. Now he is healed—and now that he is saved, his



faith is twice as strong. It is not this way: he believed and then the miracle happened and then it was all over."<sup>14</sup> In my view, Kierkegaard means that believing and miraculous healing come together and that faith is not something that is just picked up when it is needed and then dropped off after it has showed its usefulness: "No, the fulfillment doubles his faith; after the fulfillment, his faith is twice as strong as it was before he was saved."<sup>15</sup> Further, the miraculous in a way emerges as a part of the 'state' of faith, which is provided by God. So, there is evidence in Kierkegaard's signed writings, too, of faith trying to grasp what is not immediate in our experience and that the idea of a miracle is closely linked to the idea of faith.

One could argue, Kierkegaard suggests in *Journals and Paper*, that because a miracle is unreasonable, it cannot be a miracle—but, Kierkegaard asks "would it be a miracle if it were reasonable?"<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, one could conclude that because one has finally been able to establish that a miracle is understandable, it is indeed a miracle—but then, Kierkegaard points out, "it is indeed no miracle."<sup>17</sup> Kierkegaard then asks intellectual analyzers of a miracle to "let miracle be what it is: an object of faith."<sup>18</sup> This is an interesting point, because, to turn to writings of Climacus and Anti-Climacus, the paradoxical unity of the god and a human being in the teacher is according to Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*, not *a*, but *the* object of faith.<sup>19</sup> Further, Climacus also writes about encountering the paradox without distorting its true nature.<sup>20</sup> So, one could argue for miraculousness of the paradox and, indeed, Climacus may be suggesting something like this in *Philosophical Fragments* when he writes that "the paradox is the most improbable" and the "the paradox is the wonder."<sup>21</sup> But this line of thought needs and, in my view, deserves another study.<sup>22</sup>

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus writes how "he [Lessing] does not deny (for he is quick to make concessions so that the categories can become clear) that what is said in the Scriptures about miracles and prophecies is as reliable as other historical reports, in fact, is as reliable as historical reports in general can be"<sup>23</sup>—that is, not reliable, since, according to Climacus, all historical knowledge is always doubtful and only an approximation.<sup>24</sup> Climacus is suggesting that from some event being historical it logically follows that this event is contingent and that all reports depicting that event are doubtful. Climacus points out now that the alleged miracle by Christ is a historical and contingent event and, consequently, *all* reports recording it are inevitably doubtful and there is nothing I can do to change the situation.

What if I had lived during the time of the god as the

teacher and had had the wonderful opportunity of witnessing personally his life and teaching? Would not this contemporaneity have made a difference? Unfortunately, according to Climacus, this alternative would not make my situation any easier than that of a person who is reading about Christ's miracles in the Bible. In my view, Climacus' main point in "The Situation of the Contemporary Follower" in *Philosophical Fragments* is the non-immediate divinity of 'the god.'<sup>25</sup> According to Climacus, the servant form of the god is not like a disguise, which can be taken off at will. The god really is a servant and a human being, but at the same time he is a godhead. Climacus even writes how the god "has himself become captive, so to speak, in his resolution and is now obliged to continue (to go on talking loosely) whether he wants to or not. He cannot betray his identity."<sup>26</sup> To further 'go on talking loosely,' it is not possible for the learner to take a peek behind the god's human form and get a glimpse of his 'true' divinity. That is, it is not *humanly* possible; only the god himself can grant the learner this occasion. Even an attempt to increase the amount of historical information about the god by the learner brings neither the god's divinity nor the learner's eternal happiness any closer to the learner, or, as Climacus puts it, "it is easy for the contemporary learner to become a historical eyewitness, but the trouble is that knowing a historical fact—indeed, knowing all the historical facts with the trustworthiness of an eyewitness—by no means makes the eyewitness a follower, which is understandable, because such knowledge means nothing more to him than the historical."<sup>27</sup> Consequently, to return explicitly to miracles, no amount of trustworthy eyewitness information attesting the authenticity of the alleged miracle, say, the raising of Lazarus from death, can make the eternally significant occasion more 'available' to the eyewitness learner than to a learner who learns about the miracle two thousand years later in the Bible.<sup>28</sup> To Climacus, then, a miracle is not a 'back-door' from historical to eternal in the sense that the more or less established historical authenticity of a miracle would make the transition from historical to eternal more obvious or more direct than in a case of no historical evidence supporting the authenticity of an alleged miracle.

Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity* discusses, among other things, the situation when a person encounters a human being who claims to be God and who performs alleged miracles. What should that person think of such a 'God'? More particularly, if that person thinks that that enigmatic human being might really be God, could then a well established miracle finally convince him and demonstrate that he really is dealing with God? Anti-Climacus' answer is 'clear': "The miracle

can demonstrate nothing, for if you do not believe him [Christ] to be who he says he is, then you deny the miracle.<sup>29</sup> Anti-Climacus' point is, as I see it, that if a person first wants to form a well-founded belief in the authenticity of a certain miracle by Christ and then, based on this belief, (if he) is ready to conclude and believe that Christ really is who he says he is, this means that the person in question has completely misunderstood what miracles can do: "The miracle can make aware—now you are in the tension, and it depends upon what you choose, offense or faith; it is your heart that must be disclosed."<sup>30</sup> Anti-Climacus means that if you see a miracle this means that you also see Christ, but if a person doubts Christ's authenticity, an attempt to establish the authenticity of a certain miracle does not lead that person to 'real' Christ, who was a human being, who in a stunning way defined himself as God. Instead, a person encounters Christendom's "fantasy picture of Christ, a fantasy God-figure, directly related to performing miracles."<sup>31</sup> As I see it, Anti-Climacus is now referring to a kind of altar-piece image of Christ with immediately observable divinity despite a human form, and an immediately observable ability to perform miracles, too. "But this is an untruth;" Anti-Climacus insists, "Christ never looked like that."<sup>32</sup> Anti-Climacus thinks that miracles can make a person aware that he is now possibly in the presence of God, but there cannot be anything like a direct route from miracles to faith, because miracles are never immediately miracles. From something being inexplicable (that is, like an alleged miracle), in Anti-Climacus' words, "it still does not follow that it is a miracle."<sup>33</sup> In my view, Anti-Climacus means that faith, as he understands it, does not come in small 'packages'; either you believe the whole thing or you do not believe nothing at all. Faith in the truth that Christ really is who he says he is—faith in the paradox—is not a conclusion of an argument based on the established authenticity of Christ's miraculous acts. Historical study of miracles leads to doubtful historical results, but faith deals with the eternal, and there is no immediate or direct way from the former to the latter, as both Anti-Climacus and Climacus say.

I conclude that Kierkegaard, in his signed writings, uses the difference between an event 'contrary to the order of nature' and an event 'above the order of nature' to suggest that he endorses a distinction between the 'merely marvelous' and the 'truly miraculous' in the following sense: The 'truly miraculous' refers to an event which violates the established order of nature, and the 'merely marvelous' refers to an event which is very unusual and surprising, but does not violate the established order of nature. There is evidence in Kierkegaard's signed writings and in his pseudonymous writings that Kierkegaard recognizes a strong order of

nature and a strong bond of natural laws. On the other hand, he thinks that a person should not let the order of intervening causes alienate him from God, who is the source and preserver of all order. Further, the idea of a miracle expressed explicitly in terms of violation of the laws or order of nature is not important to Kierkegaard.

Historical reports are always doubtful, and so are personal experiences, in the sense that there is an unavoidable logical gap between an immediate experience and the leap of belief or faith to 'what really happened.' I claim that the idea of the unavoidable doubtfulness of all historical knowledge and the 'non-immediate' meaning of personal experience are the most important reasons for Kierkegaard's 'narrow' interest in miracles. Reports telling about true miracles are just a subsection under the section which includes *all* historical—that is, doubtful—reports. Even personal and 'convincing' miraculous experience would make no difference, because the miraculous element observed in a subjective experience is never immediate or self-evident, but 'emerges' only in the happy passion of faith, which, consequently, is in the focus of interest where miracles are concerned.

<sup>1</sup> Cfr., for example, Evans, C.S. (1983) pp. 236, 258-259, 268; (1992) pp. 160-162, 165-166, 195 n. 39; (1994) pp. 63, 68-70, 76, 82-83; Ferreira, M.J. (1990) pp. 63-66; Law, D.R. (1993) pp. 187-188, 195; Pojman, L.P. (1983), 135-136, 140; (1986) pp. 71-73.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, D. (1995) p. 115 n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 277 (SV1 IV, 159) (All references to Kierkegaard's works are according to *Kierkegaardiana*, the first one refers to the Hong translation of Kierkegaard's works). I point out regarding the use of 'marvel' instead of 'miracle' by Hongs that 'vidunder' can be translated as 'miracle,' too.

<sup>4</sup> *Journals and Papers* 3130 (Pap. X, 2 A 594). I point out that this is the only place where 'Naturens Orden' is indexed in *Pap.*

<sup>5</sup> SV, 271 (SV1 VI, 254) and *Practice in Christianity*, 165 (SV1 XII, 154). Regarding Kierkegaard's other uses of 'order,' the most interesting one, in my view, is Anti-Climacus' idea in *SD* according to which God wants to maintain order in existence, because God "is not a God of confusion" (*SD*, 117 (SV1 XI, 227)). Regarding 'order,' cfr., also, *TTL*, 9 (SV1 V, 177); *Works of Love*, 209 (SV1 IX, 201). I notice that 'order' is not indexed in *Journals and Papers* and 'Orden' is not indexed in *Pap.*

<sup>6</sup> *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 243 (SV1 IV, 131-132).

<sup>7</sup> *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 521 n. 110.??

<sup>8</sup> *Journals and Papers*, 1333 (Pap. IV A 190).

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the phrase 'intervening cause,' cfr. also *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 41 (SV1 III, 46); *Philosophical Fragments*, 75 (SV1 IV, 239) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 543 (SV1 VII, 474).

<sup>10</sup> *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 69-70 (SV1



XII, 353-4).

<sup>11</sup> *BI*, 74 (SV1 XIII, 167), 109 (SV1 XIII, 197); *EE1*, 153 (SV1 I, 130); *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 33 (SV1 III, 38); and *SV*, 40 (SV1 VI, 42). I point out that 'naturlov' is not indexed in *Pap*.

<sup>12</sup> *Works of Love*, 294-295 (SV1 IX, 281-282).

<sup>13</sup> *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 132 (SV1 XI, 268).

<sup>14</sup> *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 176 (SV1 XII, 278).

<sup>15</sup> *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 176 (SV1 XII, 278).

<sup>16</sup> *Journals and Papers*, 2720 (*Pap. X 1 A 373*).

<sup>17</sup> *Journals and Papers*, 2720 (*Pap. X 1 A 373*).

<sup>18</sup> *Journals and Papers*, 2720 (*Pap. X 1 A 373*).

<sup>19</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 62 (SV1 IV, 227).

<sup>20</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 59 (SV1 IV, 224).

<sup>21</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 52 (SV1 IV, 218-19).

<sup>22</sup> Regarding this idea, cfr., for example Pojman, L.P. (1983) pp. 134-136, 140 and Evans, C.S. (1983) p. 236.

<sup>23</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 96 (SV1 VII, 76).

Climacus is here referring to Lessing's treatise "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power" (cfr. Lessing, G. (1967) pp. 51-56.)

<sup>24</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 23 (SV1 VII, 12).

<sup>25</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 55-71 (SV1 IV, 221-234).

<sup>26</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 55 (SV1 IV, 221).

<sup>27</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 59 (SV1 IV, 225).

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. also *Bogen om Adler*, 47 (*Pap. VII 2 B 235, 89*), where 'Petrus Minor' points out that if "one can understand that those men eighteen hundred years ago believed that it was a miracle, then one can just as well say straight out that one does not believe it oneself." 'Petrus's' point is that if a person has 'real' faith, he can encounter Christ in his own everyday life without being offended at Christ's paradoxical nature.

<sup>29</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, 97 (SV1 XII, 93).

<sup>30</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, 97 (SV1 XII, 93).

<sup>31</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, 97 (SV1 XII, 93).

<sup>32</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, 97 (SV1 XII, 93).

<sup>33</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, 97 (SV1 XII, 93).

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## REVIEWS

### A Last Stitch in Time... or A Map of the Map of Kierkegaard's World

*The Essential Kierkegaard*  
Edited by Howard and Edna Hong  
(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000) 524 pgs

By Jamie Lorentzen

*When a woman works on a cloth for sacred use, she makes every flower as beautiful, if possible, as the lovely flowers of the field...she spares nothing but uses the most precious things in her possession; then she disposes of every other claim on her life in order to purchase the uninterrupted and opportune time of day and night for her sole, her beloved, work. But when the cloth is finished and is placed in accordance with its sacred purpose—then she is deeply distressed if anyone were to make the mistake of seeing her artistry instead of the meaning of the cloth or were to make the mistake of seeing a defect instead of seeing the meaning of the cloth.—The Essential Kierkegaard, 270 (fr. "Preface" to Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits)*

To my knowledge, no St. Olaf College student ever looked at an abridged or selected volume of any kind with a more skeptical eye than after having participated in one of Howard Hong's courses. Hong's anti-abridgement, anti-anthology, anti-secondary criticism mantra was one of his classic and most durable professorial positions among his young charges. It ran something like this: Carry on, but remember to read the primary text, the whole text, and nothing but the text...before you read it again. Then Hong would strike terror in young awakening hearts by promising to return to follow up on *how* his students studied. Appropriating the Button-molder's words to Peer Gynt, he would say, "We'll meet at the next crossroads...and *then* we'll see—we won't say more."

Hong's reasoning was nobly spawned, informed as it was by a changeless *telos*. He meant to help students think for themselves about a particular author instead of merely witness them parrot an editor or critic's perceptions of an author that either is stated or implied in criticism or

abridgements. In addition, Hong assumed Thomas Mann's assertion that "only the exhaustive can be truly interesting." In other words, Hong had no time for abridged, half-baked ideas.

In the 520-page anthology, *The Essential Kierkegaard* (ed. Howard and Edna Hong, Princeton University Press, 2000), Hong still does not waver from his passion for plenary reading. In fact, two paragraphs of his ten-paragraph "Introduction" constitute a disclaimer, or at least an explanation, of difficulties he and Edna faced when unstitching unabridged texts that they so artfully sewed up in English translations for more than a half century—only to restitch an abridged text.

"A sample," Hong concedes, "is certainly not the whole, and a plurality of samples is still not the totality of the comprehensive plan." Then comes the anthology's purpose: "Each sample, however, is an invitation, an invitation to appropriate the part and then to move on to the source, the work itself, which in turn invites the reader to seek out its neighbor volumes" (xi). Savvy to the draw that a good anthology may have to both new and lapsed Kierkegaard readers, Hong comes to terms with the apparent contradiction. If the anthology invites or reinvites readers into Kierkegaard's plenary world (and, by extension, into readers' own plenary worlds), then whatever contradiction that may exist is negligible. In other words, anthologies can be upbuilding books, too.

This being said, the Hongs still are obliged to deliver a substantive and qualitatively unique anthology, an anthology that goes beyond the Bretall anthology (Princeton, 1946) in scope and vision—an anthology that maps out Kierkegaard's own comprehensive map.

Obvious advances are made upon the Bretall anthology, beginning with the Hongs' good fortune of selecting

from the entire corpus of Kierkegaard's writings—a canon that they, in great part, translated, edited, and recently completed in the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series (26 definitive, systematically uniform volumes, Princeton), Further:

- As in the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series, volume and page numbers exist in the margins of *The Essential Kierkegaard* that refer to the first collected Danish edition, *Søren Kierkegaard's Samlede Værker*. Marginal pagination offers a cursory understanding of the size of breaks in the abridged texts and the degree to which the abridgement surveys all or particular sections of the primary text.

- The Hong selections span the whole of Kierkegaard's authorship (the Bretall anthology excludes more than a dozen of Kierkegaard's titles, including *From the Papers of One Still Living*, *The Concept of Irony*, *Johannes Climacus*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Prefaces*, *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, articles from the *Corsair* affair, *Christian Discourses*, *The Lily in the Field...*, *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, *For Self-Examination*, *Judge for Yourself!*, and *The Book on Adler*).

- Hong's introductions to each selection are briefer and more historical. The uninitiated reader is given more exposition to read with a clear understanding of each selection's purpose (but not so much exposition that the reader's interpretation of the selection may be tainted before the selection is even read).

- From scores of advisors, the Hongs received nominations of "must-be-included" selections to help compile a more objective, publicly definitive anthology. Conversely, Bretall states in his "Preface" that he picked selections for his anthology that interest him and that "may have an interest for others." Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with Bretall's mode of selection, a substantive ethical component is at work in the Hong's method. The latter's mode of attempting to frame a difficult author like Kierkegaard in a single volume is something akin to Ishmael's mode of comprehending a painting in *Moby-Dick* (a painting that also appears to be so dark, defaced, murky, boggy, soggy, and squitchy that it could "drive a nervous man distracted"): "only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose." Careful inquiry of the neighbors, then, seemed especially significant to the Hongs in their compilation of *The Essential Kierkegaard*.

## A Survey of the Contents

Entries from *Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* are an excellent introduction to the anthology. More likely than not, they may be the first pages of Kierkegaard read by a first-time, college-age reader. The entries, then, are appropriately penned by a young Kierkegaard trying to find a voice and a purpose: "What I really need is to get clear about *what I am to do*" (8). The second selection (fr. *From the Papers of One Still Living*—ostensibly a critique of Hans Christian Anderson) is an equally appropriate follow-up. In it, Kierkegaard emphasizes the need for each human being to establish an earnest life-view upon which to build a life of thought and action.

The abridgements from Kierkegaard's dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, link the young writer not only to his life-long mentor, Socrates, but also to one of his life-long literary styles: irony. Other substantive themes that surface throughout Kierkegaard's authorship find their soil in *Irony*; Hong notes some of them in his "Introduction" to the selection, which include immediacy, reflection, selfhood, subjectivity, objectivity, the esthetic, the ethical, the religious, and anthropological contemplation.

Selections from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* are important to any anthology, given Kierkegaard's perennial dedication both to distinguishing between the esthetic and the ethical/ethical-religious and to his discussion of human freedom. Both the Hongs and Bretall offer selections from "Diapsalmata," "Rotation of Crops," "The Seducer's Diary," "The Esthetic Validity of Marriage," and "The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical...". Selections from the "Seducer's Diary" are fewer in the Hongs' edition, perhaps to save space for choice passages from "Immediate Stages of the Erotic."

From *Four Upbuilding Discourses*, the Hongs select part of the discourse entitled "To Need God is a Human Being's Highest Perfection." Their abridgement includes a favorite of Howard's: an extended analogy of a self and its deeper self (a sort of imaginative rehearsal to the opening pages of *Sickness Unto Death*). In addition, it asks directly what most every age of Kierkegaard either directly or indirectly asks: "What is a human being? Is he just one more ornament in the series of creation; or has he no power, is he capable of nothing? And what is his power, then; what is the utmost he is capable to will?" (87).

*Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, like *Either/Or*, also are central to a Kierkegaard anthology. Aside from Johannes de Silentio's discussion of the tragic hero versus the knight of faith and of the teleological

suspension of the ethical, the Hong's include the wonderful passage on how Silentio attempts to identify a knight of Faith by appearance alone—only to discover that such a knight would look just like a tax collector. In *Repetition*, the Hong's include the parable of the repeating professor (perhaps as invitation to lapsed Kierkegaard readers to reread?).

The selection from *Fragments* (primarily from "Thought-Project") is necessary insofar as the reader may appreciate Kierkegaard's distinctions between his intellectual prototype (Socrates) and religious prototype (Christ). The bits from *Johannes Climacus* brings the concept of doubt into sharper relief. From *The Concept of Anxiety* comes an abridged version of Adam as the universal particular, both entire race and individual person. Many aspects of the "becoming of the self" and of the "anthropological aspects of freedom" (Hong's words in his "Introduction") surface here.

The selection from *Prefaces* includes perhaps Kierkegaard's most compact and expansive figurative construction: a rapid-fire, multi-imagistic simile of what a preface is like (this is worth the whole selection itself). As an ode to earnestness, "At a Graveside" (from *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*) is invaluable to the Kierkegaard canon as it centralizes earnestness in Kierkegaard's thought.

In the selection from *Stages on Life's Way*, the Hong's are smart to keep it brief (only parts of the beginning and end of that big book are offered), yet they are able to catch the intoxicating flavor of the pseudonyms in the "In Vino Veritas" selection. Perhaps the Hong's were banking pages for the big 60-page abridgement of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which highlights the subjective existing thinker, the art of communication, the maxim "truth is subjectivity," the development of the (religious) self, further notes on humor and irony, distinctions between Religiousness A and B, and "A First and Last Declaration." The whole selection begins with Johannes Climacus's famous discussion of how he came to "make difficulties everywhere"—a passage quoted at the outset of Hong's "Introduction" to the anthology.

A brief selection follows, recognizing Kierkegaard's affair with *The Corsair* and the preface to his "second authorship." Then comes a selection from *Two Ages*, which ostensibly represents Kierkegaard's hand at direct literary criticism. The Hong's wisely select from the Part Three of the critique—the culturally prophetic examination of "The Present Age," which especially critiques the media, the public, and the passionless.

Hong's "Introduction" to the selections from "An

Occasional Discourse" (or "Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing") includes an apt observation. He writes that, in "Purity of Heart," "Kierkegaard relentlessly pounds sand in every evasion rat hole of double-mindedness and typically leaves the reader to work out the implications of the clues to the nature of the good" (269).

From *Works of Love*, selections tend toward the core aspect of that volume, namely, Kierkegaard's implicit sense of social and Christian ethics. Representative pieces from *Christian Discourses*, *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air* (particularly his discourse on silence), and *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* (particularly "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle") follow.

Then comes what perhaps may be considered Howard Hong's own primary "must-read": the opening pages of *Sickness Unto Death*, which may be considered the crystallization of Kierkegaard's philosophical anthropology. Also included in this selection is Anti-Climacus's discussion of despair as sin.

The *Practice in Christianity* selection includes the parable of the child looking at the crucified Christ and Anti-Climacus's discussion of Christ as the prototype to imitate (the prototype theme surfaces again in the selection from *Judge for Yourself!*). Following a brief selection from *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, some of Kierkegaard's most beautiful parables, found in *For Self-Examination*, are offered: the parable of the love letter, of the royal coachman, and of Nathan.

Selections from *The Book on Adler* are dedicated primarily to Kierkegaard's concept of authority, while selections from *Late Writings* reveal a directness of "hard-hitting criticism" and "caustic caricature" (Hong's words) of the established order that is Kierkegaard's endgame to an authorship that began in indirect communication.

The anthology concludes first with selections from Kierkegaard's *On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, about which Hong writes: "These works are about the writings and the personal engagement of the author in the writing...which Walter Lowrie has called 'a religious autobiography so unique that it has no parallel in the whole of literature in the world'" (449). The ultimate selection is from *The Changelessness of God*, which Hong claims to be "representative of the *total Anlæg* [comprehensive plan] at its core and in its intent" (482). The selection begins with a prayer, and then considers what some have claimed to be Kierkegaard's most beloved New Testament passage, James 1:17-21: "Every good gift



and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of variation...."

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Just as Howard takes the task of plenary study of primary texts seriously, so do he and Edna take the task of creating the new anthology seriously. The result is not simply a hodgepodge patchwork of Kierkegaard's writing nor a reconstruction of his greatest hits. Rather, it is a plenary portraiture based upon the Hongs' 60 years of passionate Kierkegaard studies, translations, and persistent neighborly dialogues; it is a fine *textus*, or needlework sample, of Kierkegaard's more profound ideas regarding what it means to be a human being. Consequently, the volume begs to be read in its entirety, if only to figure out the map that the Hongs have unfolded to guide the reader to as proper an understanding of the map of Kierkegaard's world as is possible in one volume. In this context, and through such an anthology, the Hongs carry on Kierkegaard's words about his own writings; namely, they "hope to achieve the following: to leave behind...so accurate a characterization of Christianity and its relationships in the

world that an enthusiastic, noble-minded young person will be able to find in it a map of relationships as accurate as any topographical map from the most famous institutes" (*Journals and Papers*, i., p. 455).

Carry on, Howard and Edna, with the knowledge that your map in a single individual volume (the final fruit of a long, rich vine) will help any noble-minded single individual to approach the final crossroad with a noble heart.

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## Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought

By John Lippitt  
(Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000) pp. xii + 210, \$65.00

By  
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It has become regrettably common – indeed, it is virtually the norm – for academic reviews to appear approximately two years after the publication of the book being reviewed. This has a serious and deleterious effect on scholarly exchange – not least because short-run scholarly books often go out of print soon after reviews have appeared. On the whole I have avoided contributing to this process but, in this case, I must plead guilty. It is, of course, the fault of the usual pressures: too much work, change of job, etc. Whatever the reasons and however good (or not) my excuses, it is now two years since the publication of John Lippitt's book and many readers of the *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* will already be familiar with its contents. At the same time, a careful reader of the 'Acknowledgements' will see that I am named as an external reader for the original book proposal and am (correctly) described as having been 'enthusiastic' on its behalf. This combination of factors makes it inappropriate, in my view, for me simply to offer a normal review of *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*. Instead I shall concentrate mainly on looking at one or two issues that arise out of Lippitt's work but that go beyond it. This, incidentally, I take to be a virtue in a book such as this: that it does not simply provoke us to argue with it in its own terms but also to engage more deeply with the questions and issues that it addresses. Even a cursory acquaintance with Kierkegaard's work will suggest that these questions and issues are of central importance and – given the relatively little explicit or sustained attention given to the category of humour (in the event the more central of the two elements in Lippitt's title) in the secondary literature – that the relevance of Lippitt's book will therefore be of long-term interest to Kierkegaard scholars. Parenthetically, my guess is that it will be of similar long-term interest to philosophers interested in the question of humour, but I am less qualified to comment directly on their needs and expectations.

Nevertheless, for those who have not yet looked at it, a preliminary overview may be of use as background to such a development of themes and issues.

The title, it should be said, is potentially misleading. Signalling the topic as humour and irony in *Kierkegaard's* thought, Lippitt soon (pp. 3-5) makes it clear that he is by no means attempting an overall interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of or use of irony and humour. Rather, he is limiting himself almost entirely to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and to the persona of Johannes Climacus as being Kierkegaard's humorist *par excellence*. The impression is that this is not so much a result of Lippitt taking a strong view on the distinctiveness of the pseudonyms but rather of a pragmatic or tactical delimitation of the field. At that level there is undoubtedly enough material to work on, though I would argue that there remains a case – strengthened perhaps by the appearance of Lippitt's book – for a larger study of what the title promises, i.e., a study of humour in Kierkegaard as a whole. It would, for example, be interesting to set the more philosophical conception of humour as merely a 'confinium' of the religious (as it is said to be by Climacus) against the idea that appears already in the early journals that humour presupposes a radically Christian conception of the separation of things earthly and heavenly and to be a sphere in which 'all is made new' (JP 1711), even 'the joy that has overcome the world' (JP 1716). This invites the reflection that if humour is presented by Climacus as the incognito of the religious, then perhaps Climacus the humorist is himself the incognito of a Christian view of life that goes beyond what he is prepared to sign up to in his text. Whatever view may be taken on this, the question as to the overall strategic place both of Climacus's concept of humour and of Climacus himself in Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole is a question that has its own legitimacy, however important and correct the internal examination of the Climacian position (and its implications) may be.

Kierkegaard/Climacus is generally regarded as a proponent and practitioner of what is called the 'incongruity theory' of humour and the comic. In Climacus's own words 'where there is life there is

contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comic is present' (cit. P. 8). Lippitt partially endorses that, but also wants to qualify it. Most of Climacus's examples of humour are, he says, categorizable as cases of 'inappropriateness' in D. H. Monro's sense of 'the linking of disparates ... the collision of different mental spheres ... the obtrusion into one context of what belongs in another' (cit. P. 9). However, this is only Climacus's starting-point. His distinctive contribution, in other words, is not as someone proposing the incongruity theory for our consideration but as someone who, starting from a sense for inappropriateness, goes on to exploit this in a number of different and interesting ways.

First up amongst these is the use of humour in his attack on Hegel. Indeed, his relentless satirizing of the self-delusions of Hegelianism is one of the most immediately striking and most memorable features of Climacus's magnum opus. As Lippitt sees it, such a humorous approach to a major and complex philosopher is not simply trivializing the task of philosophy. On the contrary, it does serious philosophical work. It is a form of indirect communication, for if we experience Hegelianism as susceptible to being laughed at in this way we are led to reflect on the legitimacy of the seriousness of Hegelians' claims about themselves. That we can laugh at some of the formulations of claims about 'absolute knowledge' is not irrelevant to our overall assessment of the concept of absolute knowledge itself. What would such a concept have to be if it were not to be laughable? Perhaps there's no such concept that wouldn't be laughable when seen from a standpoint that takes into account all we know of human beings' limitations and foibles.

But humour does more than show up the absurdities of philosophical hubris: it also serves what Lippitt believes is Climacus's more constructive long-term aim of encouraging us to tread the path of moral perfectionism. For humour contributes to the kind of transformative process that Jamie Ferreira has analysed in terms of gestalt-shifts and metaphors. The incongruity element of humour enables us to access previously closed domains of insight and experience. More than simply reflecting the transformative process it facilitates leaps into new existence-spheres. And more still: via Socrates and Swift we are led to see Climacian humour as positively contributing to the constitution of an ethical wisdom. Against Reinhold Niebuhr, humour is not simply something that is left behind in the ultimacy of the Holy, but belongs to the virtue of the religious and moral person. It is, Lippitt concludes (in what might be regarded as somewhat of an understatement – to the point of irony - after all that has gone before), 'an extremely valuable part of a truly ethical or religious life' (p. 174)

Let me, then, raise a couple of issues that are set in play by Lippitt but by no means resolved within his suitably modest and self-imposed constraints.

The first has to do with the legitimacy of the comic. This could not but become an issue for Kierkegaard in the wake of his own vilification at the hands of *The Corsair*. Already in the *Postscript* (and thus before *The Corsair's* attack), however, Johannes Climacus was sensitive to the possibilities of a cruel abuse of humour. Following Lee Barrett (albeit critically), Lippitt notes four conditions that must be satisfied if the comic is to rank as legitimate. The first is that there must be something momentous in tension with what is trivial. The second is that it must be polemical or, as Lippitt redefines the point, 'that the satirist needs to have a *position*.' (p. 129) The third is that the comic contradiction must not be painful, i.e. cruel (as, Kierkegaard says, Holberg's humour often was). Finally, the humourist must offer 'a way out' of the contradiction.

The problem, as I see it, is not, however, with formulating such guidelines. The problem is in their actual application. Think of Nazi satires on Jews. Most of us would see these as simply persecutory. But from the Nazis' own point of view such satires might well seem to fit the criteria just outlined. There is, after all, clearly something momentous at stake – the purity of the race – juxtaposed with what are seen as the absurdities of Jewish appearance and behaviour. Nazi satirists were certainly polemical and had 'a position': they were not simply making fun of Jews for the sake of it. But when we come to the third criterion, surely there is no way of missing the cruelty of such satire? For us, maybe not. But then we are not anti-Semitic. If we were we would not regard Jews or other inferior races as having a right to common human compassion: we would not be being cruel, we would be responding appropriately to the threat of racial contamination. And, of course, the Nazi humourist has his 'way out' of the contradiction. Analogous points could be made with regard to, e.g., Soviet satire against enemies of the people or all manner of racist and sexist jokes (which Lippitt does indeed discuss).

Perhaps a less horrible version of a similar point might be constructed with reference to the film *Life is Beautiful*, a comedy set in a concentration camp. Few films in recent times have quite so divided critical opinion quite so furiously. Many (including some survivors of the camps) saw the attempt to get a laugh out of situations in which millions died in conditions of utter horrendousness as virtually blasphemous. Others (also including some survivors of the camps) saw it as a sublime affirmation of human goodness in the face of all the dehumanizing

forces epitomized by the 'Final Solution'. Yet, often, both sets of critics may have shared similar concerns about the legitimacy of the comic in general terms. The problem was the actual judgment on this particular work.

Now it may be that I am wilfully glossing over subtleties in Barrett's and Lippitt's presentations of the guidelines for the legitimate use of the comic and probably my 'justification' of Nazi satire is stretching a point. Nevertheless, I believe it highlights the problem that the application of such guidelines presupposes some more fundamental decisions about what is or is not an appropriate object of humour. What is or is not 'momentous'? What is or is not an appropriate 'position' from which to launch humorous sallies? When does it all go too far and become merely cruel? What could constitute a way out in any given case? Take Kierkegaard himself: isn't it easy to imagine a point of view from which this excessively irritating man might just have been seen as 'asking for it' in relation to *The Corsair*? And, as regards his own use of humour, it is striking that the Scotsman Andrew Hamilton who visited Copenhagen in 1847 wanted very much to speak to him, but didn't dare - because he feared being made a fool of by Kierkegaard's sharp wit. The legitimacy of humour, in other words, may well depend on prior agreement about the nature of the context in which it is being deployed, i.e., the acceptance of common social, intellectual, etc. horizons. Can humour itself help decide whether these are legitimate?

The second question concerns humour as virtue. This, I should acknowledge, reflects a general unease I have about the current fashionability of virtue amongst philosophers. This unease probably reflects my own Protestant suspicion of anything that could savour of what used to be called 'works-righteousness', i.e., taking our virtue or our goodness as a somehow non-negotiable element in the God-relationship. But it may also reflect a sense - isn't it an inescapable sense, after the twentieth century - that good people can do or can connive in wicked things? No amount of virtue can guarantee against our making the most horrendous moral mistakes. John Major and Douglas Hurd, for example (British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in the early to mid-1990s), were probably about as decent politicians in terms of personal virtue as we are likely to get these days in public life - and yet they pursued a policy in Bosnia that effectively gave carte blanche to genocidal activities. Virtue, in brief, is not bankable but, to speak in Kierkegaardian terms, it can be 'safeguarded' only under the sign of 'repetition', that is, that it is nothing if it is not made effective in each new situation of moral demand. Everything comes down to getting it right in the specific constellation of circumstances that here and now

confronts us.

Yet it seems natural to speak of a 'humorous person' and to see humour in this way as an attribute of persons. Clearly we all know some people who are more ready than others to see the humorous side of life and, on the whole, we feel in a pre-reflective way doubtless, that it's good that such people are as common as they are. Their humour contributes to the overall common good in a diffuse but real way. Isn't it therefore 'good' to cultivate humour in ourselves and, whether in ourselves or in others, to regard it as a virtue? Sure: what I have just said should not be taken as a would-be prohibition on the development of virtue (including humour), but simply as a critical comment concerning the value we place on it. Virtue is fine, but it doesn't get us very far. Being a humorist is all very well, but we cease to be one the moment we mistake the occasion for showing it - and what art is more situational, more occasion-specific, than the comic?

These last points have been, perhaps overly polemical - but, if Lippitt is right, it does not follow that they are ill-humoured. And that invites a final comment. Since Kant, the 'tone' of philosophy has from time to time been an issue in philosophy. Lippitt's book is 'about' humour, and although it is not a funny book it has a nice lightness of touch suitable to its topic - and one, I think, that could be emulated in philosophical discussions on very different subjects. I hope I've done something if I've managed to maintain that tone.

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